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ABSTRACT

Gender stereotypes imply that men and women use different strategies to influence other people in personal and professional contexts. This study examined the strategies used by 68 male and 91 female college students to influence their friends. Subjects completed a questionnaire about a close nonromantic friend of the same sex or of the opposite sex, or a romantic friend of the opposite sex. Subjects wrote a paragraph describing how they got their way with their friend, checked whether they used several power bases with the friend, and answered questions about the relationship. Men reported using bilateral indirect and unilateral indirect strategies more than did women; women reported using unilateral direct strategies more than men; and there was no gender difference in the use of bilateral direct strategies. Patterns in romantic and nonromantic other-sex friendships were similar, but women used direct, unilateral strategies more in romantic than in nonromantic friendships. Results suggest implications concerning the relative equality of men and women in different kinds of relationships. (Author)

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Influence Strategies in Nonromantic and Romantic Friendships

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Abstract

Sixty-eight male and 91 female college students completed a questionnaire about a close nonromantic friend of the same sex or of the other sex, or a romantic friend of the other sex. Subjects wrote a paragraph describing "How I get my way with my friend," checked whether they used several power bases with the friend, and answered a number of questions about the relationship. Men reported using bilateral indirect and unilateral indirect strategies more than women did, women reported using unilateral direct strategies more than men, and there was no gender difference in use of bilateral direct strategies. Patterns in romantic and nonromantic other-sex friendships were similar, but women used direct, unilateral strategies more in romantic than in nonromantic friendships. Results are discussed in terms of the relative equality of men and women in different kinds of relationships.

Influence Strategies in Nonromantic and Romantic Friendships

Gender stereotypes imply that men and women use different strategies to influence other people in personal and professional contexts. Men are seen as more forceful, women as sneaky (Johnson, 1976). Prior research has lent support to stereotypic notions.

Johnson (1976) pointed out that indirect influence strategies are used by people who lack power. Women may use indirect strategies, such as personal and helpless tactics, indirect reward and coercion, and referent power, whereas men may use direct strategies, such as concrete tactics, their competence, direct reward and coercion, and expert, legitimate, and informational power. Johnson also suggested that men have more flexibility regarding the strategies which they may use, in that men are "allowed" to use indirect strategies, but women are not "allowed" to use direct strategies.

Looking at self-reported and role-played behavior, Kelley et al. (1978) found that women cried, sulked, and criticized their partner´s lack of consideration for feelings; men showed anger, rejected their partner´s tears, asked for a logical and less emotional approach, and gave reasons for delaying discussions.

A few researchers have discussed influence strategies used in heterosexual dating relationships, proposing that patterns found in marriages are likely to emerge at earlier stages in relationships, as well. Falbo and Peplau (1980) asked respondents to write an essay describing "How I get my way with" a romantic partner. Half of the subjects described their heterosexual relationships and half described their homosexual relationships. After factor analyzing coded strategies, the authors identified two important dimensions by which strategies could be categorized, direct vs. indirect, and unilateral vs. bilateral. Falbo and Peplau found that women in heterosexual relationships were more likely to use indirect and unilateral strategies than any other group. Lesbian women and heterosexual and gay men used direct and bilateral strategies. Thus, sex differences emerged only in heterosexual relationships. Falbo and Peplau argued that heterosexual romances tend to elicit stereotypic sex roles, particularly regarding influence strategies.

Falbo (1977) found that sex role, rather than gender, predicted influence strategies. Feminine people used tears, emotional alteration, and subtlety more than masculine or androgynous people. Masculine and androgynous people were more likely to use

assertion than were feminine people. Bradbury and Solano (1983) found that androgynous respondents were more likely to use reasoning, talking about what they wanted, and telling the partner they have experience concerning the matter than those with undifferentiated sex roles. They used reasoning more than feminine respondents and talking about what they want more than masculine respondents. Masculine subjects used telling, reasoning, and assertion more than other groups.

Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz (1986) studied reports by both partners of influence tactics used in heterosexual and homosexual intimate relationships. They identifed six strategies, which they characterized as weak, strong, or neutral. Weak tactics were manipulation and supplication, strong tactics were bullying and autocracy, and neutral tactics were bargaining and disengagement. They found that both sex and sex role were related to the use of weak tactics, in that the partners of men (regardless of influencer's gender) and feminine people used weak tactics more often. They also found that those with relatively fewer resources such as income, attractiveness, and education, and dependence on the partner more often used weak or neutral tactics. However, sex and sex role explained more of the variance than resources

explained. Finally, they report that disengagement was used more by men than by women, and that bargaining was used more by men with employed female partners, contrary to Falbo and Peplau's (1980) findings.

Using French and Raven's (1962) bases of power, Raven, Centers, and Rodrigues (1975) argued that husbands and wives use different kinds of power tactics. Women rely more on referent power than men, whereas men rely more on expertise than women do. Kahn (1984) has argued that, in relationships, men possess more of each power base than women. (See Huston, 1983, for a discussion of this literature.)

Other writers assessed the bases of power used in specific types of marriages. For example, Frieze (1979) indicated that, in battering marriages, husbands use coercive power, and wives use referent, informational, and manipulational power. Cate, Koval and Ponzette (1983) found that dual career couples use more direct strategies than couples in which the wife doesn't work outside the home. They did not find sex differences among either dual-career or traditional couples, however.

If heterosexual romantic relationships elicit traditional sex roles, what occurs in nonromantic friendships? Does interacting with the other sex encourage use of stereotypic influence strategies, or

do features of romantic relationships cause such differences? There is very little research regarding same-sex or other-sex friendships, particularly concerning influence strategies.

In a comparison of strategies used by adolescents with their parents and their friends, Cowan (1981) suggested that people learn to vary strategies in different kinds of relationships. The more equality in a relationship, the more direct and bilateral are the strategies which are used. Friendships may be more equal than romantic relationships (Davis & Todd, 1982), elicit less modeling of parental roles, and involve fewer expectations derived from conceptions of marital roles than romantic relationships. Hence, the present study investigated both friendships and romantic relationships.

Hypotheses were: 1. women use more indirect and unilateral influence strategies than men in other-sex friendships and romantic relationships; 2. women use more direct and bilateral influence strategies in same-sex friendships than in other sex friendships or in romantic relationships; and, 3. women rely more on referent power than men and men rely more on expertise than women.

Method

Respondents

The subjects were 68 males and 91 females enrolled in freshman level introductory and developmental psychology courses. They completed the questionnaire during their regular class.

The mean age of respondents was 19.38. Sixty-five percent of respondents were freshmen, 23 percent were sophomores, 6 percent were juniors, and 6 percent were seniors.

Respondents said they spent an average of 4.36 hours per day with their friends, whom they had known an average of 3.77 months. The friends' mean age was 19.82. There were no sex differences in these variables. Same-sex friends (M = 6.86 months) had known each other longer than other-sex nonromantic friends (M = 3.26 months), who had known each other longer than romantic friends (M = 1.96 months; $F(2,119) = 14.25$, $p < .001$). Romantic friends (M = 7.02 hours/day) spent more time together than same-sex friends (M = 4.36 hours/day), who spent more time together than other-sex friends (M = 2.63 hours/day; $F(2,119) = 8.61$, $p < .001$). Respondent sex and friendship type did not interact on any of these factors.

Materials and Procedure

Each subject was assigned to think of a close nonromantic friend of the same sex, a close nonromantic friend of the other sex, or a romantic friend of the other sex. (Although a fully balanced design would have been desirable, it was impossible to get a sample of same-sex romantic partners equivalent to the other samples.) The entire questionnaire was completed regarding this particular friendship. Thus, there were six conditions generated, females and males describing a same-sex friendship, females and males describing an other-sex friendships, and females and males describing a romantic partner of the other sex.

The survey consisted of background information on both the respondent and the friend they chose to describe. Then subjects wrote a short paragraph on "How I get my way with [my friend]," (Falbo & Peplau, 1980). Respondents checked whether they would use each of French and Raven's (1962) bases of power with their friend. Each power base was described in one sentence. Finally, on 8-point scales they rated questions asking "how easily would you say that you can influence this friend," "how easily would you say that this friend can influence you," and "what would you say is the balance of power in your relationship with this friend?"

Results

Coding of Questionnaires

Essays were coded using Falbo and Peplau's (1980) categorization. The first statement of an influence attempt in each respondent's paragraph was extracted and typed on a sheet with people in all four conditions intermixed. The author, without knowing what condition a response came from, and a senior psychology student, unaware of response conditions or hypotheses, each categorized the tactics using the scheme described by Falbo and Peplau. There was 80 percent agreement. A second psychology student then coded the responses on which the first two raters had disagreed and his coding served as tie-breaker. This produced agreement between at least two of three judges on 95 percent of the responses; the remaining 8 (5%) responses were deemed unclear and these subjects were not used in subsequent analyses of power strategies.

The dimensions of direct vs. indirect strategies and bilateral vs. unilateral strategies were assessed. Falbo and Peplau (1980) classified directness and laterality in this way: Direct, bilateral strategies included bargaining, reasoning, persistence, and talking; direct unilateral strategies included asking, stating importance, and telling; indirect, bilateral

strategies were positive affect and hinting; indirect unilateral strategies were negative affect, withdrawal, and laissez-faire; and persuasion was considered bilateral, but neither direct nor indirect.

Direct questions about influence were coded separately. Frequency of respondents who checked that they used each base of power was calculated.

Influence Strategies

The most common strategy used by all respondents was bilateral and direct (women = 60%; men = 58%). The influence strategy categories did not differ by friendship type, but there were gender differences. Men reported using both bilateral (16% vs. 1%) and unilateral (7% vs. 1%) indirect strategies more than women did. Women reported using unilateral, direct strategies more than men (36% vs. 12%).

There were no significant gender differences in strategies used by same-sex friendships. Percentages for men and women, respectively, were: direct bilateral, 43% vs. 29%; indirect bilateral, 4% vs. 5%; direct unilateral, 18% vs. 14%; indirect unilateral, 0 vs. 5% ($\chi^2(3)=7.19$, $p = .07$). In other-sex friendships, women were more likely to use direct bilateral (53% vs. 33%) and direct unilateral strategies (28% vs. 10%); men reported using indirect bilateral (10% vs. 0) and indirect unilateral strategies more (10% vs. 3%; $\chi^2(3)$

= 24.45, $p < .001$). In romantic friendships, women reported using direct bilateral (55% vs. 40%) and direct unilateral (36% vs. 0) strategies more; men reported using indirect bilateral strategies more (12% vs. 0; $\chi^2(2) = 42.92$, $p < .001$).

When the three friendship types were compared within each sex and strategy type, some differences emerged. Women used more direct bilateral strategies in other-sex and romantic relationships (same-sex friendship = 43%; other-sex friendship = 53%; romantic = 55%); they used more direct unilateral strategies in romantic than in other-sex friendships, and more in other-sex than in same-sex (same-sex = 18%; other-sex = 28%; romantic = 36%; $\chi^2(6) = 18.13$, $p < .01$). For men, direct bilateral strategies were used more in romantic than in other-sex friendships, and more in other-sex friendships than in same-sex friendships (same-sex = 29%; other-sex = 33%; romantic = 40%; $\chi^2(6) = 27.39$, $p < .001$). There were no differences for either men or women in other strategy categories.

When asked about their use of power bases, in same-sex friendships, men reported using expertise (24% vs. 6%; $\chi^2(1) = 11.33$, $p < .001$) and referent power (33% vs. 19%; $\chi^2(1) = 4.39$, $p < .05$) more than women; in other-sex friendships, men reported using expertise (29% vs. 15%; $\chi^2(1) = 4.92$, $p < .05$) or no strategies

(38% vs. 21%; $\chi^2(1) = 6.15$, $p < .05$) more than women; in romantic friendships, men use referent power (50% vs. 35%; $\chi^2(1) = 4.01$, $p < .05$) more, whereas women use informational (42% vs. 69%; $\chi^2(1) = 13.69$, $p < .001$) and coercive (31% vs. 4%; $\chi^2(1) = 23.41$, $p < .001$) power more.

Discussion

Contrary to the hypotheses, men and women's use of bilateral direct power did not differ. In addition, women report using more direct tactics than men, but men used bilateral indirect strategies more than women. These patterns were similar in all three types of relationships.

In other-sex and romantic relationships, there were some gender differences. Women use direct bilateral and unilateral strategies more; men use indirect bilateral strategies. The patterns were similar in both types of relationships involving men and women, supporting the argument that norms learned in romantic relationships may also affect nonromantic friendships.

Both men and women use direct bilateral strategies more in romantic than in other-sex and more in other-sex than in same-sex relationships. Only women use direct unilateral strategies differently in the friendship types, using them more in romantic than other-sex and more in other-sex than same-sex friendships. This is contrary to the argument that same-sex frienships are more equal and should allow the use of direct bilateral strategies more than friendships with the other sex. Assuming that direct bilateral tactics are used in equal relationships, a

greater attempt at equality of influence tactics occurs in romantic than in other relationships. In addition, women may distinguish somewhat more between different kinds of relationships, since they use unilateral direct strategies differently in different types of relationships.

In regards to the power bases, there were no differences between men and women in same-sex friendships. However, there were differences in other-sex friendships in that men reported using expertise more, as was predicted from prior research. Yet, men also reported using referent power more than women. In romantic relationships, women used informational power more than men, as predicted, but women also used coercive power more, contrary to predictions.

One possible mediating variable is suggested by Instone, Major, and Bunker (1983), who report that gender differences in influence attempts by supervisors in role-played organizations were related to self-confidence. Women had lower self-confidence than men, and low self-confidence people tend to rely on coercive strategies and use fewer influence tactics. Perhaps women also have less self-confidence in their ability to influence men in relationships, and therefore they use coercion more.

Eagly's (1983) analysis of social influence provides a broader conceptual interpretation of these findings. She argues that the greater status of men in most organizational settings accounts for the small gender differences in influence and influencibility found in the literature. Without roles clearly defined in terms of status, people assume that men have greater status than women, and behave accordingly. A similar phenomenon may occur in relationships. Without well defined expectations, probably often the case in these times of changing gender roles, people may still assume that women have lower status than men. Thus, women may be more inclined to use the strategies associated with lower power when in relationships with men.

However, these findings suggest that there is more equality in romantic and nonromantic other-sex relationships than prior research would suggest. Perhaps relationship equality has become so much the norm that men and women each are able to use direct, bilateral strategies more than they used to do, regardless of whether the relationship is with the same or other sex or whether it is romantic (Harris, 1981; Huston, 1983).

An alternative explanation is that these differences reflect people's awareness and willingness to admit to using influence tactics with friends.

Although Kelley et al. (1978) do report that people used the strategies they say they used in role-plays, researchers have noted that reactance may be especially high concerning influence in close relationship because the notion of influence violates norms about intimate relationships (Huston, 1983).

Furthermore, it is possible that men are more reluctant to report direct influence than women. The author has noted that men are more likely than women to say they are offended by the notion of influence in relationships in classroom discussions and in research with married couples (Madden, 1987). In this sample, they were reluctant to describe any influence strategies more than women were: 15 percent of women and 34 percent of men either said "friends should not try to persuade friends" or left the essay blank. This may explain the greater reported use of referent power by men in this study. Although this points to a limitation in using self-report measures to study influence, it also suggests interesting gender differences in perceptions of friendships worthy of further research.

Another area for potential research is influence in friendships across the lifespan. Although lifelong patterns found in friendship may emerge in the late adolescent years, undoubtedly expectations about

relationships are affected by experiences with friendships and changes in life circumstances. Do similarities in influence strategies used with the other sex in romantic and nonromantic relationships persist as one matures? How does the length of a relationship affect the strategies one uses?

Clearly further research is needed to understand gender differences in influence strategies. The present findings indicate that gender differences reported in other research should be treated with great caution and suggest several areas for further investigation.

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